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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
16 April 1975

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Indochina
(As of 1600 EDST)
No. 14

VIETNAM

1. The level of military activity dropped somewhat on April 15, with the bulk of Communist-initiated actions occurring in Dinh Tuong Province. The Communists still appear intent on severing Route 4 to cut Saigon off from the delta provinces. 25X1

2. At least two regiments of the North Vietnamese 3rd Division, [REDACTED] have moved from the Moc Hoa - Cambodian border area to Dinh Tuong Province.

3. To counter the new Communist buildup in Dinh Tuong and Long An provinces, the commander of the delta region realigned some of his forces on April 15. He has divided the five most threatened provinces in the northeastern part of the region into two zones, assigning the zones to the 7th and 9th Divisions, respectively. Despite these changes, the region's three divisions are already overextended, with one regiment of the 7th Division in Long An Province southwest of Saigon and with the 21st Division tied down in defense of Can Tho City.

Phan Rang Lost

4. The city of Phan Rang and the nearby airbase have been overrun by Communist forces. Although government officials recognized that the rebuilt 4th Regiment of the 2nd

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Division was not in condition to engage in heavy fighting, they did not think the Communists would be able to sweep aside the Airborne and Ranger units there.

5. The fate of the government forces is unclear. Some remnants of the 2nd Division including the division commander, apparently were evacuated by sea. The commanding general of the regional forward headquarters was unable to leave Phan Rang Airbase by plane because rebellious Rangers seized his plane at gunpoint and fled. It is believed that the general and his staff are heading south overland together with survivors of the hard hit Airborne brigade.

6. Some regional officials are blaming President Thieu for the defeat because he had personally ordered Military Region 3 Commander General Toan to extend his forces into MR-2 to defend Phan Rang. There have been no recent reports from Phan Thiet the last government enclave in MR-2 -- but the Communists are likely to continue their southward thrust through Phan Thiet and then follow Route 1 west towards Saigon.

The Xuan Loc Battlefront

7. Although government forces are still holding the city of Xuan Loc, the situation along the roads west of town is rapidly becoming critical. The Communists launched heavy new attacks on the Airborne brigade southeast of Xuan Loc on April 16. Since other government units defending the perimeter of the city were not attacked, regional officials believe the Communists are deliberately attacking the strongest unit hoping to inflict a major loss and thereby sap the resolve of the remaining forces defending Xuan Loc.

8. The South Vietnamese are speculating that the entire North Vietnamese 325th Division may now be involved in the fighting west of Xuan Loc. [redacted] suggests that one regiment of the division helped overrun Kiem Tan District, and officials are guessing that the large number of attacks throughout the Route 20 area could mean that more of the division may be committed. Even without this additional division, the Communists three-division force

[REDACTED]

appears to be on the verge of smashing Saigon's eastern flank and moving towards Bien Hoa and Saigon.

9. The Communists have also been putting heavy pressure on the junction of routes 1 and 20 west of Xuan Loc and now control the intersection and much of the surrounding terrain. A series of sharp attacks against the South Vietnamese 18th Division's 52nd Regiment yesterday near the junction forced most of the regiment to destroy artillery weapons and retreat. About 300 survivors of the regiment made their way back to friendly lines, but the 52nd is no longer an effective fighting unit. The eight artillery pieces destroyed were providing good support to government units in the area, and the loss of this support further erodes the government overall position on the Xuan Loc battlefield.

10. With the recent fall of Kiem Tan District on Route 20 and the rout of the 42nd Regiment, the Communists now have complete control of this highway and can bring additional combat units directly to the battlefield from the southern highlands.

North Vietnamese 1st Corps Nearing Saigon Area

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11. The North Vietnamese Army 1st Corps is rapidly approaching the provinces northeast of Saigon. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] The 1st Corps left North Vietnam in early April and was spotted in the triborder area of Laos - Cambodia - South Vietnam on April 12.

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12. Two of the corps four divisions -- the 312th and the 320B -- preceded the corps headquarters in the move South, and both have now had sufficient time to reach the provinces north of Saigon in Military Region 2. [REDACTED]

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The [REDACTED]

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arrival of the corps headquarters in Quang Duc Province and the 312th on the border provides further confirmation that those units are indeed destined for the Saigon area.

PRG Offers to Negotiate

13. Deputy Prime Minister Tran Van Don has reported that he is in contact with a spokesman for the Viet Cong's Provisional Revolutionary Government. Don apparently has developed this contact through a trusted intermediary for over a week.

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15. Nonetheless, the scenario that Don says he has been receiving from his PRC contact could be a Communist effort to persuade someone in senior South Vietnamese government circles that a political settlement of the conflict is still possible. A similar scenario has been given to Buddhist leader Thich Tri Quang through a contact he also believes speaks for the PRG.

16. During what appears to be the initial contact on April 11, Don was again reminded that the PRG would never consider negotiations with Thieu as president. Such discussions could begin only after Thieu had been replaced by a government headed by a "neutral" figure and comprised of "third force" personalities and "leftists." This new government could include "pro-American politicians." The contact allegedly indicated that this meant a government headed by Don would be acceptable.

17. According to Don, the PRG spokesman stated that Communist strategy "at the moment" is to isolate Saigon.

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[REDACTED]

The Communists allegedly do not want to attack Saigon directly, preferring to "take their time" in assuming control, meanwhile allowing evacuations to proceed in an "orderly" fashion. If Communist troops should move into the city quickly, evacuations for "everyone" would be "impossible."

18. In a follow-up contact on April 14, Don was informed that he should assume control of the government "within 72 hours and call for a ceasefire. All Americans would be permitted to leave the country except for a "core" that would be needed to run the US Embassy. In addition, any Vietnamese who wished to leave, including those at Hue and Da Nang, allegedly would also be given safe passage.

19. The PRG spokesman indicated, however, that the Communists might be running out of patience and that the "next week or two" was crucial. Saigon would be safe for that period, but, if talks had not begun by then, Communist forces would be "in position" to take over the city.

20. These warnings conform to the line passed by PRG representatives overseas, particularly Paris. The latter have maintained that the Communists do not want to attack Saigon but prefer a "political solution," but that this is impossible with Thieu still in power.

CAMBODIA

21. Prince Sihanouk has reportedly rejected as "unacceptable" a ceasefire proposal offered by government leaders in Phnom Penh. A French newsman in the Cambodian capital said that the proposal was worked out at an all-night session at Prime Minister Long Boret's home in Phnom Penh and that the proposal fell somewhat short of being an offer of unconditional surrender. [REDACTED]

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22. So far there has been no reaction to the government's proposal from the Khmer Communists, who would obviously have

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the last word on whether to accept or reject it. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Communist leaders probably have not yet learned the details of the government offer. Given the rapidity of the Communist advance on Phnom Penh, it seems likely that the fighting will end as government forces lay down their arms of their own accord rather than through any formal surrender talks.

23. Meanwhile, Red Cross representatives in Geneva and government officials in Phnom Penh have declared Le Phnom Hotel to be a "neutral zone". Approximately 30 westerners, including a number of US journalists, are at the hotel. United Nations Secretary General Waldheim is also reportedly trying to make the hotel a "safety zone" under United Nations auspices.

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25. A number of nations are planning to or are in the process of switching diplomatic recognition to Sihanouk's "government."

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[REDACTED] Stockholm announced today that it would establish relations with Sihanouk as soon as possible and the Australians and Finns indicated that they were also ready to do so when the Communists assume power in Phnom Penh.

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